



Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Watford Borough Council 2016/17

A report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer and
scrutiny chairs

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1. Introduction and overview of 2016/17

In 2016/17 the scrutiny structure comprised Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the overarching committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. Community Safety Partnership Task Group continued to monitor the Community Safety Partnership. (See scrutiny structure on this page.)

Task Groups which took place during 2016/17 were –

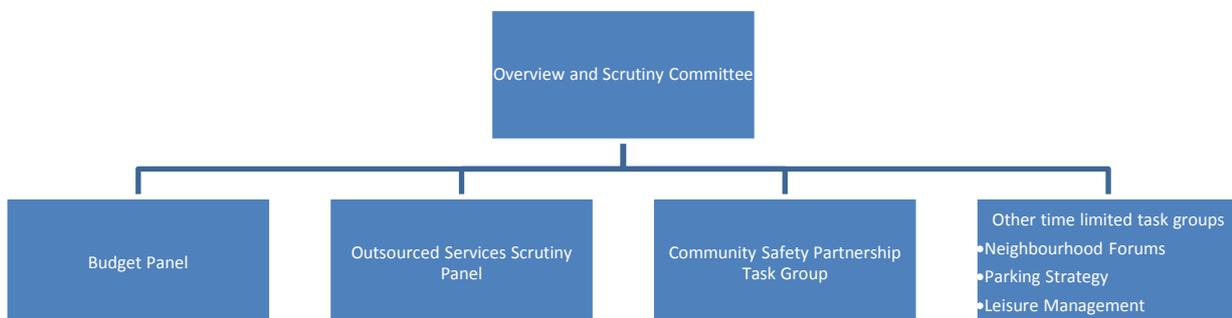
- Neighbourhood Forums (agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2015/16, but carried out during 2016/17)
- Parking Strategy Year 1 recommendations
- Leisure Management Contract Retender

The Annual Survey has been carried out and a summary of the results can be found in section 6 of this report.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer has continued to attend the Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network, a network of officers from the County Council, the ten district and borough councils, within Hertfordshire and neighbouring local authorities in Bedfordshire. The network provides an opportunity to share scrutiny related information and training across the councils. Further details are provided in section 7.5.

In 2016/17 33 out of 36 councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting; this was an increase when compared to 2015/16. 27 councillors had participated in a scrutiny meeting as a member or a substitute. Five portfolio holders attended scrutiny meetings to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive. One councillor had attended a meeting solely as an observer and participated when permitted by the scrutiny committee.

Scrutiny structure 2016/17



2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership:

Councillor Kareen Hastrick (Chair)

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Vice Chair)

Councillors Joe Fahmy, Asif Khan, Rabi Martins, Anne Rindl, Nasreen Shah, Darren Walford and Tim Williams

The following Councillors also participated in Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year: Councillors David Barks (Chair of the Leisure Management Contract Re-tender Task Group), Nigel Bell (call-in councillor), Stephen Bolton (substitute), Stephen Cavinder (Chair of the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group and council representative appointed to Citizens Advice), Amanda Grimston (substitute), Jane Johnson (substitute), Anne Joynes (substitute and call-in councillor), Bilqees Mauthoor (observer), Mo Mills (call-in councillor) and Matt Turmaine (observer)

The following Portfolio Holders attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year: Councillors Karen Collett (portfolio Holder for Communities), Stephen Johnson (Portfolio Holder for Housing) and Councillor Peter Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Client Services)

2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2016/17

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on seven occasions this year, which included two meetings to consider two called in decisions. The scrutiny committee received reports on the following subjects –

- **Performance updates** were presented on a quarterly basis. The scrutiny committee reviewed the performance of the Key Performance Indicators and other performance measures identified for review. At the meetings councillors discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas.
- **Small Grants Fund Review 2013-16** gave the scrutiny committee information about the review officers carried out about the fund. Officers provided highlights of their review and key findings. Members were advised that unsuccessful applicants were directed to Watford and Three Rivers Trust or other relevant organisations that may be of help.
- **Commissioning Framework Review** gave an opportunity for the scrutiny committee to receive presentations from the different organisations who had been commissioned to provide services within Watford. Each group gave a presentation and responded to councillors' questions. The organisations included Watford and Three Rivers Trust, Watford Palace Theatre, Citizens' Advice and Shopmobility. More organisations would be invited during 2017/18.
- **Watford Borough Council Safeguarding Overview** was presented to the scrutiny committee. It enabled councillors to have an understanding of the council's role in discharging its safeguarding responsibilities.

- **Establishing a Joint Venture and Trading Company presentation** was given by the Head of Community and Customer Services. He explained how the joint venture provided a platform to improve the housing situation. He outlined the structures of the companies and the relationship with Watford Community Housing Trust and the benefits of the venture.
- **Executive Decision Progress report** continued to be included as a regular item on the agenda following its introduction in 2011/12. The report included details of all proposed key decisions and those key decisions taken by the Executive and officers. It also included information about any consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair is consulted about any decisions which have not met the 28 day deadline or which need to be dealt with under the urgency procedures. The report enables the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether the key decision procedure has been followed correctly and if not, whether a report needs to be submitted to Council. The report included links to the relevant reports and minutes.
- **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee** continued to be included as a regular item on the agenda. The council's appointed representative for 2016/17, Councillor Kareen Hastrick, provided the scrutiny committee with an overview of the work carried out by the Health Scrutiny Committee. Full details of the Health Scrutiny Committee are available on the [County Council's website](#).
- **Updates from Budget Panel, Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and Community Safety Partnership Task Group** were provided by the relevant chairs. The updates enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be aware of the work being undertaken by the other scrutiny panels and task groups.
- **New scrutiny task groups** were agreed by the scrutiny committee. Task group chairs provided an update and presented the final reports. The task groups are set out in more detail below and in section 5.
- **Task Groups –**

Neighbourhood Forums had been agreed at the last meeting of 2015/16. The membership was agreed at the first meeting in June 2016. Councillor Cavinder, having been elected as the task group's chair provided regular updates to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and presented the final report in November. Cabinet's response was reviewed at the January meeting and later agreed in March.

Parking Strategy (Year 1) recommendations was agreed in June 2016. The proposal had been submitted by the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head. The final report was presented to the scrutiny committee in September, which included Cabinet's response.

Leisure Management Contract was agreed in September 2016. The proposal had been submitted by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services and the Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head. The final report was presented to the scrutiny committee in November. The task group's recommendations were incorporated into a report to Cabinet about proposals for the new leisure management

contract.

Further information about the task groups can be found in Section 5.

2.2 Call-in

Two decisions taken by Cabinet were called in during 2016/17. Both decisions related to the investment in Watford's adventure playgrounds.

The first call-in took place in July. Cabinet's decision had been called in by Councillors Bell, Joynes and Mills as they felt there had been a lack of consultation with residents and users. Having heard from the councillors, witnesses, officers and portfolio holders, the scrutiny committee debated the decision. It was agreed that Cabinet's decision should be ratified and the council could move forward on the resolution.

The second call-in took place in October. A further report had been submitted to Cabinet which was agreed. Councillor Joynes, Bell and Mills had requested the call-in as they felt that alternative funding arrangements had not been examined properly. The scrutiny committee heard from the councillors, a witness, officers and portfolio holders; the scrutiny committee then debated the decision. It was agreed that Cabinet's decision was ratified.

The reports and minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on the council's website – [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

2.3 Chair's commentary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has continued to review services; it has scrutinised policy, performance and progress throughout the year. The committee continues to monitor the ongoing pressures that make demands on services.

Taken from the description on the WBC website, the OSC role includes:

- monitoring all scrutiny taking place in Watford
- setting up task groups and monitoring their progress
- reviewing the progress of agreed task group recommendations
- reviewing the Executive decisions taken by cabinet, portfolio holders and officers
- monitoring the performance of services provided directly by the council
- hearing any called in decisions or councillor calls for action
- contributing to the annual scrutiny report

I feel that as a committee we have maintained those principles. The committee plays the role of a 'critical friend' to the council and as such it is crucial for the committee to be involved with decisions at an early stage in order to apply real influence. It was a mark of how the OSC has developed and is viewed throughout the council when we were asked to commission a task group for the re-tender process for the leisure management centres.

It is important to underline the fact that Watford Borough's officers are to be highly commended, not just those that attended meetings, for their team work with other departments and agencies to assist with the task group investigations.

The committee continues to receive reports from Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, Budget Panel, the Community Safety Partnership Task Group and the county's Health Scrutiny Committee. This is so all members are updated on their work, particularly PIs, topics and policies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Vice Chair, Cllr Dhindsa, all members of OSC and the other scrutiny committees for all their hard work and support over the year. Moreover, my thanks to all the officers at WBC especially the members of Democratic Services, all the outside agencies, stakeholders and members of the public and last but not least, all those who took the time to participate in the task groups.

Councillor Kareen Hastrick
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2016/17

3. Budget Panel

Membership

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)

Councillor Mark Hofman (Vice Chair)

Councillors David Barks, Nigel Bell, Paddy Kent, Ahsan Khan, Robbie Laird, Rabi Martins and Glen Saffery

The following Councillors also participated in Budget Panel during the year: Councillors Karen Hastrick (observer) and Anne Rindl (observer).

The following Portfolio Holder attended Budget Panel meetings during the year: Councillor Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Democracy and Governance)

3.1 Budget Panel's work programme for 2016/17

The Panel met on five occasions during the year and considered the following:

- **The final outturn for 2015/16** prior to it being presented to Cabinet. Members considered a number of areas in more depth: the council's favourable variance for the year, proposed carry forwards, impact of homelessness on the council's finances, capital expenditure programme, management of the council's reserves and emerging risks to the council. Budget Panel's recommendations to Cabinet were agreed.
- **Commercial opportunities for the Council.** The Chair led the panel in a review of the commercial focus which was being brought to council decision making in order to increase income and the return on capital resources. Panel members considered the activities of the Property Investment Board to rationalise and enhance the council's investment property portfolio, and the formal arrangements for the Watford Community Housing Trust joint venture company.
- **The Finance Digest Budget Monitor** was reviewed regularly by Budget Panel. Members monitored the expenditure, income and pressures on services.
- **Analysis of previous budgets and outturns 2014/15 to 2016/17.** The panel considered the revenue variances for each service for the financial years 2014/15 to 2016/17. It was noted that meaningful comparisons prior to this period were not possible because the council had not set a revised budget.
- **Temporary accommodation costs** were monitored closely by the panel. It was noted that additional provision had been made in the 2016/17 budget to meet rising demand.
- **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2017/20 and Treasury Management Strategy 2017/20** were considered by Budget Panel at its meeting in January, prior to

discussions at Cabinet and Council. The panel reviewed the report, seeking some clarification from heads of service. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.

3.2 Training

Training was provided in September to give members an overview of Local Government Finance, including how Watford Borough Council was funded.

The reports and minutes for Budget Panel are available on the council's website – [Budget Panel](#)

3.3 Chair's commentary

The panel played a good and responsible role in scrutinising the budget and finances of the council.

The panel worked together and brought forward ideas including a more entrepreneurial way of doing things for the Council. There are going to be challenges for local government and Watford Borough Council's finances. These include the continuation of austerity, the uncertainty of Brexit and the localisation of business rates; it is ever more vital that the panel plays its important role of scrutinising the finances of the council and looking at alternative ways of delivering services.

Councillor Asif Khan
Chair Budget Panel 2016/17

4. Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel 2016/17

Membership:

Councillor Tim Williams (Chair)

Councillor Anne Rindl (Vice Chair)

Councillors Stephen Cavinder, Jagtar Singh Dhindsa, Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes and Paddy Kent

The following councillors also participated in Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillors Stephen Bolton (substitute), Keith Crout (substitute) and Aga Dychton (substitute).

The following Portfolio Holders attended Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillors Iain Sharpe (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development), Councillor Peter Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Client Services) and Councillor Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Democracy and Governance).

Councillor Sarah Nelmes, Three Rivers District Council, also attended the meeting which related to the ICT service; which is a shared service with Three Rivers.

4.1 Work programme 2016/17

The panel met on six occasions and considered the following topics:

- **Introduction to procurement at Watford Borough Council**

The panel began the year with a presentation by the Corporate Procurement Manager which included an overview of the approach to procurement, governance, performance indicators and savings made in the previous year.

The discussion which followed covered staffing issues, contract specifications, the social value of contracts and the importance of both efficiencies and encouraging local suppliers.

- **Quarterly performance indicators**

The panel has received regular performance reports provided by the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. A quarterly set of indicators were prepared to help measure implementation of the corporate plan.

Over the course of the year the panel discussed:

- how targets were set and where it would be more appropriate to introduce more challenging targets
- how the different measures were interpreted
- the relationship between different indicators
- ideas for improvements in performance

Indicators relating to the Finance service are monitored by the Budget Panel as part of the Finance Digest.

The panel continues to use its in-depth review of services to suggest new indicators for monitoring.

- **The leisure centres – managed by SLM**

Following a visit to the Central Leisure Centre by councillors, representatives from SLM attended the meeting of the panel. Amongst the topics raised were staffing, customer feedback, partnership arrangements, comparative pricing and the centres' external accreditation.

The panel noted that a scrutiny task group was being set up as part of the stakeholder engagement in the re-tendering of the contract.

- **The Colosseum – managed by HQ Theatres**

The panel also had an opportunity to have a tour of the Colosseum. At the meeting, the topics covered included; the programming processes and opportunities, the challenges experienced by the venue, community events, the finances of the contract and customer feedback.

The positive working relationship with the contractor and the suggestions made by the panel were noted.

- **The waste and recycling contract – managed by Veolia**

Officers attended a meeting of the panel to provide an overview of the waste and recycling contract. The meeting considered how Watford compared to other local authorities for recycling levels, the challenges of high-rise properties and houses in multiple-occupation, the introduction of charging for additional green bins and street cleansing issues.

- **The ICT service**

The ICT service is now mixed with some aspects outsourced to Amicus and others delivered by an in-house team. The panel discussed the contract which was still in its early stages. Members discussed the structure of the service and its performance to date.

The service will be reconsidered by the panel in 2017/18 to monitor progress.

- **The parking enforcement contract – managed by Indigo**

Officers attended to discuss the latest report. There were some changes ahead with the relocation of the Parking Shop to the Town Hall. Other areas discussed included combatting blue badge fraud and the challenges of benchmarking parking data.

- **Human Resources**

The panel was attended by the Head of Human Resources who discussed the following topics with the councillors; apprenticeships, trade union representation, sickness absence and the staff recognition and reward scheme.

The reports and minutes for Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel are available on the council's website – [Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel](#).

4.2 Chair's Commentary

During the course of the year the panel looked in detail at a number of the council's outsourced services and how these were being managed, and how they were performing against the council's expectations.

The panel overall recognised that the Veolia, SLM, HQ Theatres and Indigo contracts were being well managed. It was also agreed that the Human Resources Service was performing well.

A report from ICT came before the panel in January and it was noted that significant progress had been made, however a further report to the panel will occur in late 2017 to review the service.

I would like to thank the members of the panel for their scrutiny of the council's outsourced services, for their questioning and for their due diligence.

On behalf of the panel I would like to thank all the officers involved for their hard work and support which has ensured that the panel has had a successful year.

Also thanks to our outsourced service providers for facilitating visits and for attending our meetings.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Portfolio Holders who attended our meetings and for responding to our points and answering our questions.

Councillor Tim Williams
Chair Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel 2016/17

5. Task Groups

5.1 Community Safety Partnership Task Group

5.1.1 Membership

Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)

Councillors Stephen Bolton, Stephen Cavinder, Jagtar Singh Dhindsa, Amanda Grimston, Mo Mills and Matt Turmaine

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group is a statutory group which is established each year to scrutinise the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

5.1.2 Work Programme

The task group met on two occasions and also undertook training (provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny) on best practice when conducting community safety scrutiny. A meeting, scheduled for January, was cancelled as the preparation of a strategic assessment by Hertfordshire County Council (that would inform future CSP priorities) was unavoidably delayed.

The following topics were considered at meetings:

- **Watford Community Safety Structure and priorities**

The Community Safety Coordinator outlined the role and composition of the One Watford Strategic Partnership, the Joint Authorities Group and the Community Protection Group. He provided an overview of the previous year's community safety priorities and how these had evolved in to the focus for 2016/17. He also discussed the strands of the 'Protect our Communities' and 'Reassure and Inform' priorities for 2016/17.

Members asked questions about human trafficking, rough sleeping in the Council area, drug misuse, response to knife crime incidents and about the action taken to deal with inappropriate behaviour in local parks. The Community Safety Coordinator informed members that a vigorous campaign was to be conducted to address begging in the town to deal with the most prevalent individuals.

- **Progress with the CSP Community Protection Plan 2016/17**

The Community Safety Coordinator updated the task group on progress with the five elements of the plan. He explained how research was being conducted in to sex worker issues with further funding being provided in the future. He outlined multi-agency protection arrangements for vulnerable victims. He discussed how a counter terrorism 'Prevent' e-learning package would be rolled out across the council. He explained to the task group how mental health issues were dealt with when prosecution was inappropriate.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head informed the task group that funding had been secured to enable a Hertfordshire County Council analyst to determine the demographics of the Watford community in the next four years. The product would enable research to be conducted within communities to identify their needs. She also advised that a new County Prevent Group had been established to share best practice and action plans.

- **Work programme**

Members discussed and agreed the work programme.

- **Update on the CSP Managing Crime Plan 2016/17**

Inspector Nick Lillitou, Hertfordshire Constabulary, provided the task group with an update on the plan. He explained that although crime had risen by 3.5% in Watford, this was the smallest increase across the county. He discussed issues around the historic recording of crimes, described how criminals coming from outside of the Watford area had been tackled, outlined the Safer Streets preventative campaign, explained how criminal damage and theft from motor vehicle had been reduced, discussed the use of automatic number plate reader technology and informed members how a 'Choices and Consequences' scheme operated - with the aim of reducing re-offending.

He discussed how instances of domestic abuse were managed and risk assessed and how officers wearing body cameras could assist with investigations - and explaining how repeat victims were supported. He concluded by outlining future plans in relation to the night time economy; with the focus on a multi-agency approach.

Members asked questions about the retention of fingerprint records, how crimes with an element of drug abuse, how addiction or mental health were dealt with, about domestic abuse against males, cultural differences in the reporting of crime, liaison with the Muslim community, how the police worked with young people, tenancy agreements, the Watford knife amnesty and detection rates.

- **Terms of reference for the task group**

Members were presented with draft terms of reference to clarify the legal framework, remit and working of the task group. These were debated by the councillors who asked a number of questions. The task group agreed the draft and this will go before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for final approval at the beginning of the new municipal year.

- **Community Safety Partnership risk register**

This item was dealt with as Part B as exempt information relating to the prevention of crime was to be discussed.

Members discussed the register and the officers responded to questions and comments. Following the discussions, the task group agreed that mental health, drugs misuse and hate crime would be examined by the group in the next municipal year.

The reports and minutes for the Community Safety Partnership Task Group are available on the council's website – [Community Safety Partnership Task Group](#).

5.2 Neighbourhood Forums Task Group

5.2.1 Membership:

Councillor Stephen Cavinder (Chair)

Councillors Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes, Mo Mills and Rabi Martins

5.2.2 This task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the last meeting of the 2015/16 municipal year. The scrutiny committee agreed that the new task group would be started after the local government elections held in May 2016. Following the elections, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer emailed all non-executive councillors about the new task group. The membership was agreed at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2016.

The task group met on three occasions and finalised its report in November 2016. The final report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny at its meeting on 24 November when it was agreed the report would be forwarded to Cabinet. Cabinet discussed the report at two meetings, having agreed to set up a small working group to discuss the recommendations in more detail. At the second Cabinet meeting the recommendations were agreed following some amendments. Cabinet's response was reported to Overview and Scrutiny at its meeting on 23 March 2017.

5.3 Parking Strategy (Year 1 recommendations) Task Group

5.3.1 Membership:

Councillor Derek Scudder (Chair)

Councillors Sohail Bashir, Stephen Bolton, Anne Jones and Glen Saffery

The following councillor also attended the task group: Councillor Ahsan Khan

5.3.2 The task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 June 2016, following a request submitted by the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head. The task group met on two occasions in July 2016. It focussed on 11 locations within the ring road which had been identified by officers as a result of the Parking Strategy. The task group discussed the locations with officers and commented on each of the proposals. The task group's final report was included as part of the officer's report to Cabinet in September 2016. Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided with the final report and Cabinet's comments in the same month. The recommendations were initially due to be reviewed in March 2017, but this was postponed to the new municipal year.

5.4 Leisure Management Contract Task Group

5.4.1 Membership:

Councillor David Barks (Chair)

Councillors Jagtar Singh Dhindsa, Kareen Hastrick and Tim Williams

5.4.2 The task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 28 September 2016, following a suggestion proposed by the Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head. The proposal was to review and evaluate the findings of a survey that had been carried out as part of the leisure centre management contract retender.

The Task Group met on one occasion, which took place on 18 October. Representatives from SLM were invited to the meeting to respond to any questions about the current service. Part of the meeting was discussed in private, as it was not felt that any organisation should be given an unfair advantage over others. The SLM representatives left the meeting during this part of the discussion, which was also when the task group agreed its recommendations. The final report was produced in November 2016 and presented to Cabinet as part of the Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head's Part B report to Cabinet at its meeting on 6 February 2017.

The reports and minutes of all scrutiny meetings and completed Task Groups are available on the Council's website -

<http://watford.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Task Groups' final reports are available in the online [Library](#).

For further information please contact the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

6. 2016/17 Scrutiny Survey Results

An annual scrutiny survey is carried out and councillors and those officers who have been involved with scrutiny during the preceding year are asked to participate.

6.1 Councillors' survey

Of the 36 councillors in Watford Borough Council, 17 have completed the survey; this is an increase of one response compared to the 2015/16 results. 15 out of the 27 councillors who were permanent or substitute members of a scrutiny committee or task group during 2016/17 completed the survey. The results of the 2016/17 survey showed that:

- 15 indicated they had been a member of scrutiny or a task group
- 2 were Executive councillors

Ten scrutiny members stated that they were 'very interested in continuing to take part in scrutiny' during 2016/17; the others stated that it depended on the subject being scrutinised. Ten scrutiny councillors confirmed that they had felt fully engaged and understood their role; three responded 'partially' and two 'no'. The reasons given were inexperience; lack of training; lack of guidance and direction.

Members were asked to rate how effective they felt different aspects of the scrutiny work were in the five key areas identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

- Making an impact on the delivery of public services
- Leading and owning the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to external authorities and agencies
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to the executive

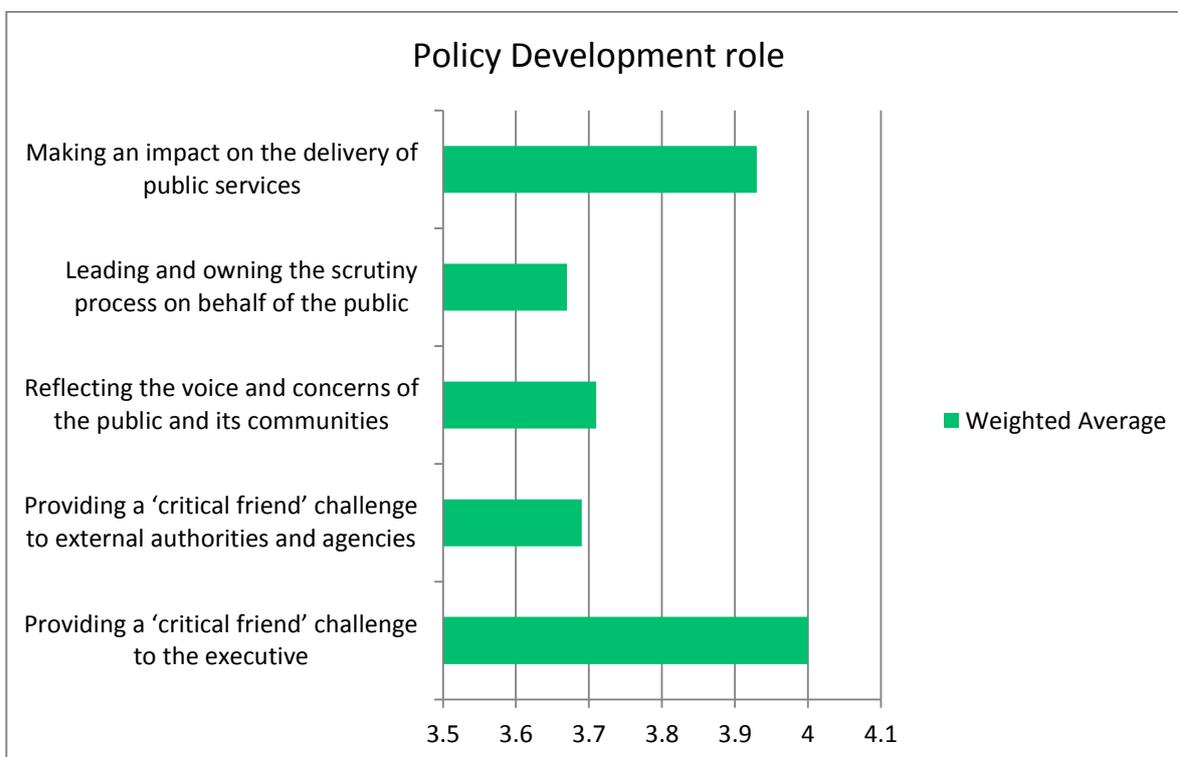
16 of the respondents completed the questions about scrutiny's roles in policy development, performance management, budget and finance and task groups. The scores were out of 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. All the aspects of scrutiny work received a rating average of 3.00 or higher. This showed a decrease of 0.46 when compared to the 2015/16 survey results. The individual scrutiny areas are explored further in the following graphs.

The first graph shows the average rating for each aspect of the **Policy Development** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.69 and the highest was 4.00. This shows a reduction on the lowest rating and an increase in the highest rating when compared to the 2015/16 results, which were 3.75 and 3.87 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 1 to 5.

Councillors were asked to add any comments about scrutiny's role in policy development. Three councillors provided comments which included –

- No evidence of OSC (Overview and Scrutiny Committee) trying to engage with wider public;
- OSC could be more challenging in reviewing emerging policies;

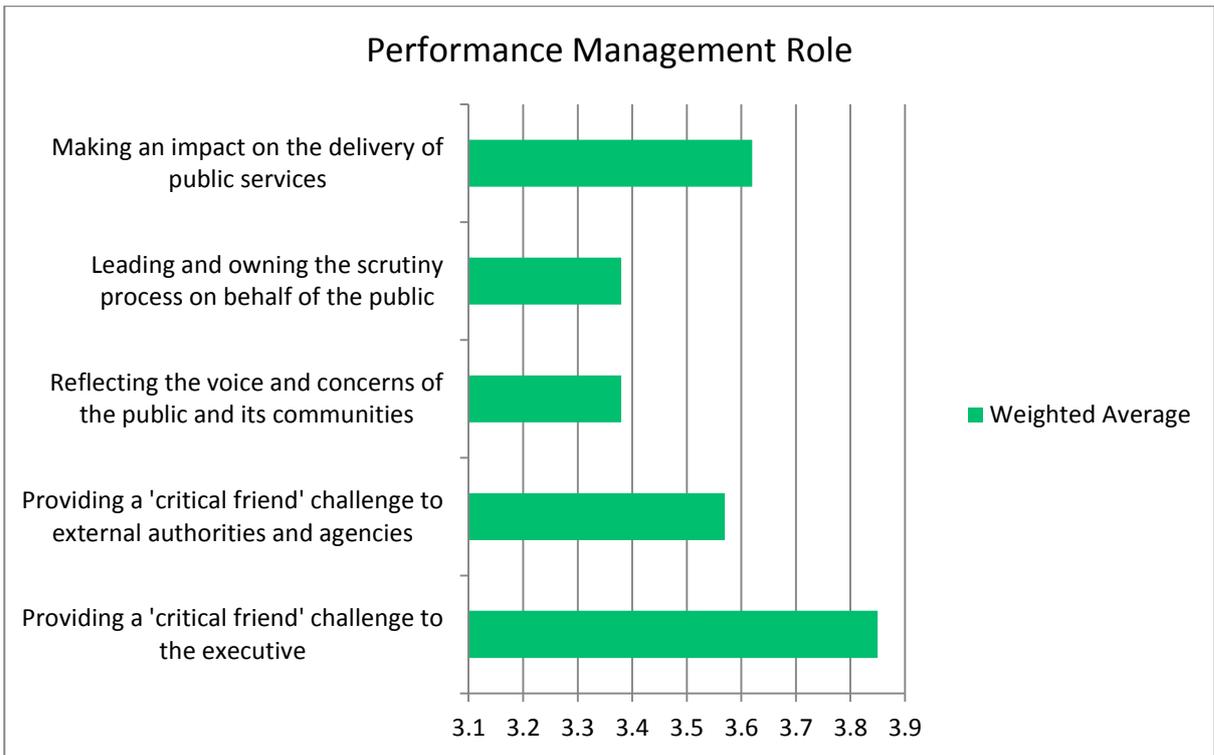
- OSC could identify gaps in policies with regard to the wider national debates and issues;
- OSC is the best forum for developing policies as backbenchers get a deeper understanding of the challenges facing the Council;
- Some members seem not to understand scrutiny, as they raise specific ward issues.



The second graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Performance Management** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.38 and the highest was 3.85. This shows an overall reduction in effectiveness on the 2015/16 results, which were 3.69 and 3.92 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 1 to 5. The ratings have decreased for this aspect for two years. It may be necessary to review how scrutiny carries out the council's performance management role.

Councillors were asked to add any comments about scrutiny's performance management role. Three councillors provided the following comments –

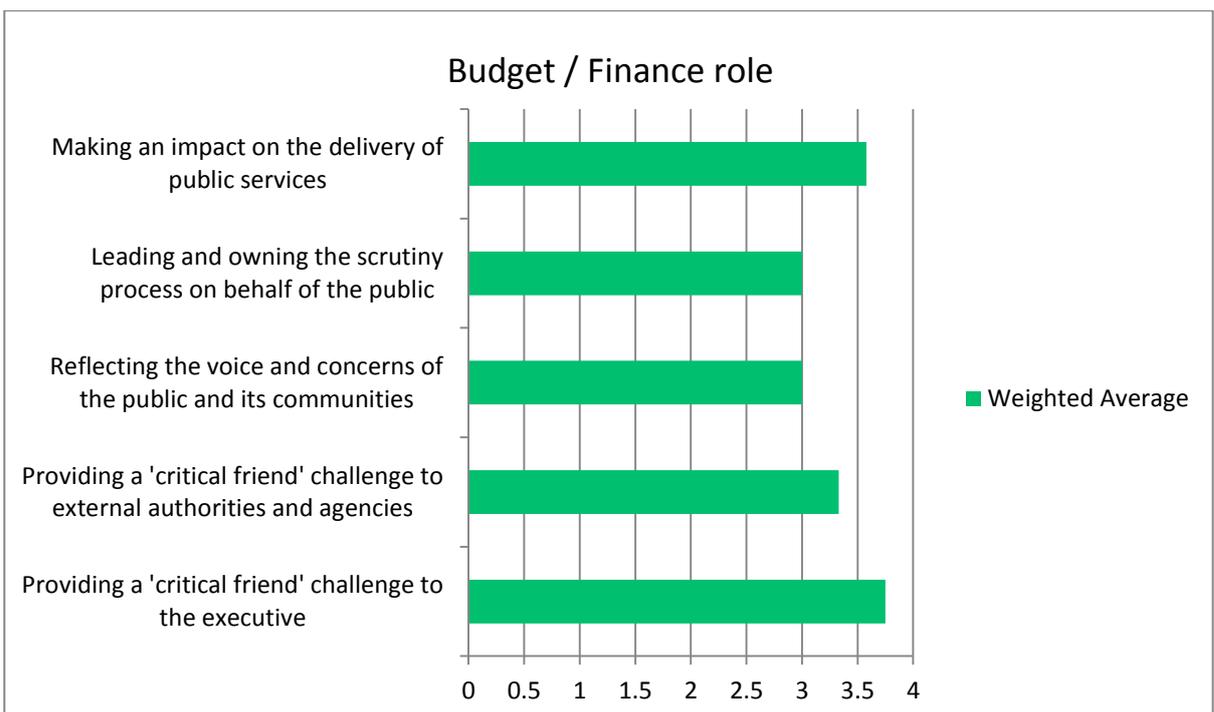
- OSC has not attempted to engage with the wider public in seeking their concerns;
- Good they have access to all KPIs (key performance indicators) and Executive members and Section Heads are called in to be scrutinised;
- Had some success calling hospital to account over parking charges but must be scope for further reviews;
- Could do more to involve the public – topics of interest – let them be part of the solution.



The third graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Budget and Finance** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.00 and the highest was 3.75. This shows a reduction in effectiveness in the lowest rating, but an increase in the highest rating when compared to the 2015/16 results, which were 3.46 and 3.69. Individual scores ranged from 1 to 5.

Councillors were asked to add any comments about scrutiny's budget/finance scrutiny role. One councillor responded and provided the following comment –

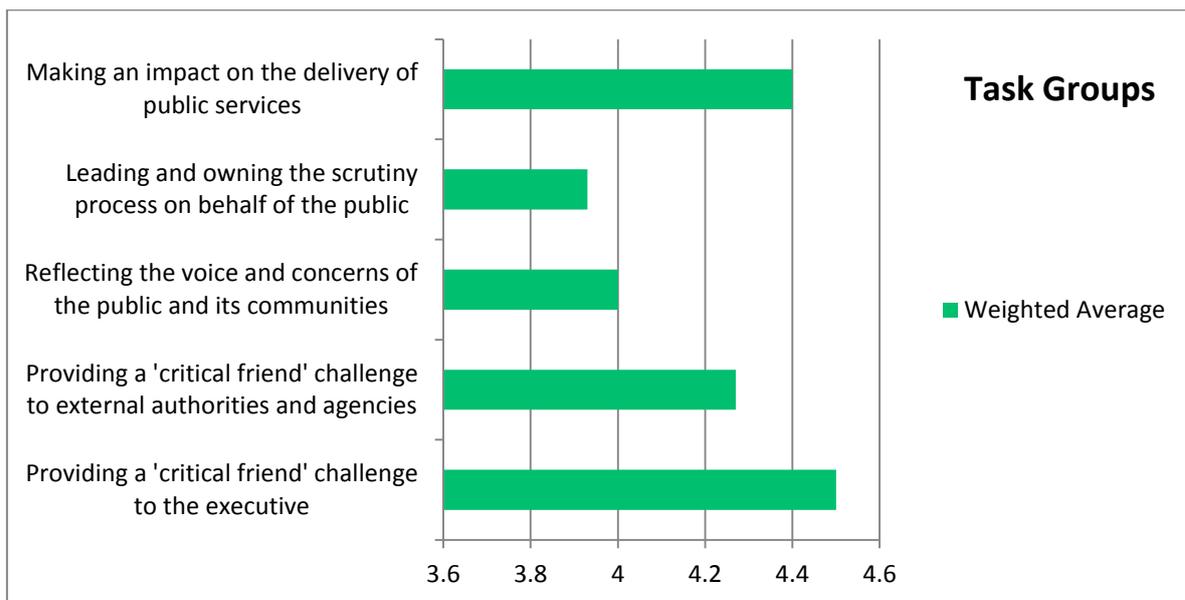
- Done a reasonable job challenging the financial performance of the council.



The final graph shows the average rating for each aspect for **Task Groups**. The lowest rating average was 3.92 and the highest was 4.50. This shows an overall increase in effectiveness when compared to the 2015/16 results, which were 3.77 and 4.08 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 1 to 5; however, the majority of responses for each section were rated as between 3 and 5.

Councillors were asked to add any comments about scrutiny task groups. Three councillors responded and provided the following comments –

- On the whole these were effective but no evidence that engaged with the residents of Watford, for example the relevance of Neighbourhood Forums to the communities they serve;
- Overall they worked well.
- Can be a danger discussions veer towards specific ward issues. Can be used as an illustration related to broader policy concerns;
- Chairs should manage discussions to keep them on track;
- Pleased community safety is focusing on specific areas, more targeted and working with partners to improve our town.



All task groups proposed during 2016/17 had been put forward by officers. Councillors were asked to provide reasons for not proposing a task group. Eight responded that they did not have a scrutiny suggestion. Three were not aware they could propose a topic. One responded that they had not thought about it. Another councillor said that they did not understand how. Councillors were also given the opportunity to put the reasons in their own words. Responses given included –

- Think this is a training issue, including Executive Members. We should be encouraged to ask the difficult questions, particularly when the council is conducting a root and branch review of what it does and how.
- Should look to scrutiny to help develop policy, but it needs to demonstrate capability and breadth of strategic understanding.
- Issues of interest were covered by the topics flagged up in the course of the year.

- Not sure it is clear what constitutes an appropriate subject for scrutiny.

Councillors were asked for their views about how scrutiny could be improved in the future. There were six responses in total. Shown below are the other comments received. Democratic Services' responses are shown in italics.

- "I couldn't comment on the task groups as the survey wouldn't let me navigate between them."

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer had checked all links to documents and websites prior to the survey going live. She had believed they were all working correctly. She will ensure that next year these are checked by other officers to ensure the links are accessible.

- "More training please"
- "Scrutiny is vital, but I reflect whether all members realise its importance, and actually understands what it is. I know that there has been scrutiny training in the past, but wonder whether like certain other committees, attendance at training should be a prerequisite of being on a scrutiny panel, particularly O&S, and OSSP."
- "I think some videos of examples of task groups in action – could be helpful to new members. Give them an idea of how O&S question officers and outside agencies."

At the new councillors' induction session covering Democratic Services and governance, members are provided with an introduction to scrutiny and given the scrutiny handbook. A scrutiny training session is usually arranged each year either provided by the Committee and Scrutiny Officer or an external provider. In additions officers monitor external training, seminars and conferences and forward the information to councillors.

In response to the suggestion of scrutiny training becoming a prerequisite to a councillor taking part in scrutiny, this will be forwarded to the Member Development Group for consideration. Officers are concerned that this may limit the number of non-executive councillors available for the time limited task groups.

The suggestion of video examples of questioning techniques is a good idea and the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will look for useful examples for future training sessions.

- "More indepth scrutiny"

Work programmes are regularly included on scrutiny committees' agendas, enabling councillor to review their forthcoming work and enable them to amend them as they feel appropriate.

Scrutiny should always be councillor-led and members are welcome to put forward scrutiny suggestions or contact the Committee and Scrutiny Officer to discuss ideas.

6.2 Officers' survey

This survey, similar to the councillors' survey, was completed by 13 officers, 11 of who had been involved with scrutiny during 2016/17. The survey showed that ten of the officers felt that they understood their role and another said 'partially'. The person who responded 'partially' had suggested that it would be useful to remind officers attending scrutiny about the protocols of the meeting. The committee and scrutiny team will ensure that all officers are aware of the meeting protocols either individually or as part of the chairs' briefings.

Eight officers stated that they had been appropriately briefed by the committee and scrutiny team, two said 'partially' and one had replied 'no'. One officer said that they had attended in a supporting position, the committee and scrutiny team will ensure that all officers they are aware are due to attend a scrutiny committee or panel are met and provided with information about the scrutiny committee, panel or task group.

The majority of officers had responded that they had felt the demands on them or their service had been manageable. Only one person said that it had been demanding. Officers were not asked for additional comments in relation to this question.

Officers were asked whether they considered scrutiny had been an effective 'critical friend' to their service. There were some negative responses this year for performance management (2), budget/finance (1) and task groups (2). The committee and scrutiny team will review the comments and identify any areas for improvement.

In 2016/17 four officers had proposed a scrutiny topic. The suggestions were taken forward and the majority were satisfied with the outcomes. However one officer was not satisfied. The committee and scrutiny team will review the comment and try to identify how it may be possible to overcome the officer's concerns.

Five comments were received about the Leisure Management Contract Retender Task Group. Overall the comments were positive and included a reference to a councillor's suggestion, which had already been adopted by the current provider. One officer suggested that a joint procurement could have been undertaken. However this was outside of the task group's remit.

One comment was received about the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group. The respondent reiterated their previous comments.

Two suggestions have been received for future reviews. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer is aware of the suggestion to review the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework post 2019. She will be working with the Section Head in order to submit the proposal to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a task group in 2018/19. The other suggestion relates to the effectiveness of the council's HR processes. As there was no response to the survey by HR, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will try to find out who may have submitted this proposal in order to discuss it further and to arrange for a proposal form to be completed if appropriate.

When asked how scrutiny could be improved officers made the following comments (responses are shown in italics):

- “I think it is a valuable learning experience for individuals. Would be good if staff were informed that they were able to attend as observers.”

Scrutiny committees, panels and task groups are public meetings and anyone can attend. Officers are always welcome. There may be occasions when the public and press have to be excluded due to the sensitive nature of the information due to be discussed. Officers may also be asked to leave the meeting at the same time.

- “Why is audit committee, which receives the internal audit reports not included as a ‘scrutiny panel’?”

Audit Committee is not part of the scrutiny process. The Audit Committee was established in 2005 following guidance from the Audit Commission and endorsed by CIPFA. The committee’s role is to oversee the council’s financial reporting process and corporate governance arrangements, receive and consider reports from the internal and external auditors and to monitor the council’s implementation of the actions arising from the auditors’ reports. One of the key requirements of the Audit Committee is that it is independent of Cabinet and scrutiny.

- “I think Elected Members could be better briefed as to the specific purpose of the scrutiny session as other issues, which would be more appropriate outside of this environment, are often raised.”

All councillors should be aware of the item under discussion as they are informed when the agenda has been published. The agenda allows them to read any attached report, which should inform them of the subject under discussion. If a report is not published the officer’s presentation should cover the relevant subject. If councillors do stray from the subject the chair should inform them that the matter is not relevant to the discussion.

When providing training or at induction the Committee and Scrutiny Officer informs councillors that scrutiny should not be looking at individual cases. It may be possible to use cases to highlight a scrutiny matter, but the councillor should not be seeking a solution for that particular case at the meeting.

- “Effective management of comments raised by member which sometimes become questions posed by members.”

The committee and scrutiny team have been made aware of this concern previously. The team are working with the various chairs and asking them to question whether the councillor making the statement/asking a question wishes to have that information forwarded to the committee/panel following the meeting. This should be something all committee/panel councillors are able to discuss and agree whether they think it is relevant to the discussion. Where questions are raised the committee and scrutiny team will take away the actions and circulate the response as soon as they have

received it. A key role for scrutiny is to investigate and question officers and the Executive about the work of the council.

6.3 Survey of members of the public and external organisations

In October 2016 the Committee and Scrutiny Officer introduced a short questionnaire which would be circulated to external guests attending scrutiny meetings. It replaced the annual scrutiny survey to external organisations and the public.

The questionnaire was sent out to all external guests as soon as possible after the scrutiny committee or panel they attended. Five questionnaires were returned. All guests had attended the meetings to give a presentation to the scrutiny committee and panels. One added that it was part of their contractual obligation as a provider of a contracted service. All guests had felt they had been well briefed prior to their meeting; they had understood their role and the purpose of the meeting and that it had a welcoming atmosphere.

Two representatives provided additional comments. The representative from SLM commented that his company had always felt very welcome at the scrutiny panel and had enjoyed the opportunity to be able to attend.

The representative from Shopmobility wished to thank the scrutiny committee for having the chance to speak to the councillors about their organisation. They listened to the scrutiny committee's comments and have already implemented one of the suggestions. They had also accepted a councillor's invitation to give a talk to the Watford Asian Elders Lunch Club about Shopmobility.

The team has found we receive a good response rate by sending the questionnaire promptly. This will help the team to identify any issues as soon as possible and find a solution.

7. Other Scrutiny work

7.1 Cabinet/scrutiny meetings

The Joint Cabinet Scrutiny meeting usually comprises the Mayor and her Cabinet and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. There were no meetings arranged during 2016/17. If these meetings are requested during 2017/18 the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will add a meeting to the calendar.

7.2 Scrutiny Training

An introduction to scrutiny at Watford Borough Council is covered in Democratic Services' presentation to new councillors at their induction. In addition the Committee and Scrutiny Officer provided an overview and scrutiny foundation training session which was open to all councillors. Councillor Collett the previous chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Hastrick the current chair attended the training and were able to add to the discussion, by explaining their experience of scrutiny and the important role non-executive councillors had in the decision-making process.

There was one training session prior to Budget Panel in September 2016, to which all councillors were invited. The training covered an overview of local government finance and how the council is funded.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny was asked to provide a specific training session for those councillors involved in the Community Safety Partnership Task Group; however it was open to all councillors. This took place in February 2017.

7.3 Scrutiny Handbook – An Introduction to Scrutiny

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer updated the Scrutiny Handbook, which has been placed on the intranet, ensuring it is available for councillors throughout the year. The handbook provides an introduction to scrutiny and its role at Watford Borough Council. It has a section on questioning skills and the different types of questions that could be used with their advantages and disadvantages. It also includes a list of previous scrutiny reviews and the list of documents available from the scrutiny library. The handbook will continue to be reviewed and adapted as required.

7.4 Scrutiny Library

The scrutiny library has been included in the scrutiny handbook 'An Introduction to Scrutiny', which is given to newly elected members and is available on the council's intranet for members' reference. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer regularly monitors the information and updates it accordingly.

7.5 Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network has continued to hold meetings throughout 2016/17. The network comprises officers from Hertfordshire County Council, the districts and borough councils within Hertfordshire and representatives from local authorities in Bedfordshire. Each authority's work programmes are circulated to the other councils, enabling officers to see what else is being scrutinised around the county. The Network enables officers to share experiences and feedback from any training they have participated in.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informs the Managing Director, Heads of Service, the Mayor and relevant Portfolio Holders of scrutiny topic groups arranged by Hertfordshire County Council. This allows officers and the Executive to consider whether they wish to be involved in the review, either by submitting a statement to the topic group or attending as a witness. Final reports from topic groups are circulated to relevant officers and councillors within the authority, enabling them to identify any recommendations related to the district and borough councils.

For further information on this report or copies of the final reports produced by the Task Groups, please contact -

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